

Buck Hill Falls Apr. 24-26, 1951

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National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
Department of International Justice and Goodwill
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Consultation on the Churches' Strategy
in Relation to Peoples of Underdeveloped Areas

There has been a wide-spread recognition in our churches that the scientific and technical knowledge, and the material resources made available through such knowledge, now enjoyed by the more developed countries, constitute a trust to be used for the general welfare. This includes a special obligation to help in the economic and social advancement of the less developed countries. This obligation, which has deep roots in Christian teaching on social responsibility, has been recognized by numerous mission boards, which have included, within the limits of inadequate resources, programs of technical assistance and training as part of their work to bring to all peoples the fullness of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The so-called Point IV proposals of our government and the plans of the United Nations for an expanded program of technical assistance for the development of peoples in underdeveloped areas have been welcomed in principle by the leaders of our Churches. The broad proposals have been hailed as representing the type of positive program for peace which ought to stand in the forefront of foreign policy. Both the Federal Council of Churches and the Foreign Missions Conference have issued statements of principle, designed to support and to help guide these governmental programs that their potential promise might be fulfilled.

On the other hand, there is recognition that our Churches should, while making clear their concern and their willingness to cooperate in such programs, preserve their full freedom of action. The limitations, no less than the possible advantages of these programs, must be clearly recognized by Christians if their approach to the problem is to be realistic. The perils of technical efficiency, divorced from moral and spiritual maturity, are tragically demonstrated in the history of our time. The problems of the so-called underdeveloped areas will not be met by technics alone. The Church cannot evade its responsibility for the hungry and underprivileged but it can only discharge that responsibility by offering men more than bread.

The initial stages of the governmental programs are now in process, and the time has come for the leaders of our Churches and mission boards to take a longer and more detailed look at the Churches' strategy in regard to the needs of the peoples in underdeveloped areas, in relation to the evolving programs of government and in the life and work of the ecumenical and missionary fellowship. Therefore, the Department of International Justice and Goodwill, in cooperation with the Division of Foreign Missions, is calling together 100 church leaders for a Consultation on the Churches' Strategy in relation to Peoples of Underdeveloped Areas. Certain lay experts and representatives of the Younger Churches are being invited to meet with the group.

The meeting will be held at Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania, April 24, 25, and 26.

It is understood that such findings as may be agreed upon during the course of this consultation will be issued in the name of the group, and not in the name of the National Council, the Department, or the Division of Foreign Missions. As a tentative agenda, the following is proposed:

Questions for Consideration

1. The needs and aspirations of peoples in the underdeveloped areas

What are the most pressing needs of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the field of economic and social development? What are the major obstacles to meeting these needs? In what respects can the peoples of more developed countries help these peoples to overcome the obstacles? It is hoped to have initial presentations from lay experts, including those connected with planning U.S. and U.N. programs in this field, and from representatives of the Younger Churches.

2. The concerns of the Churches and guiding principles for programs to aid in economic and social development

What are the major concerns of the Churches in relation to these needs and aspirations?

In the light of the needs and obstacles, what principles should govern private and governmental effort to assist in the self-development of the less privileged peoples? Should the statements of the Federal Council and Foreign Missions Conference be revised or expanded? To what extent do the charters of the U.S. and U.N. technical assistance programs measure up to these standards? A preliminary study of these questions is planned as a starting point for the discussion.

3. The Churches' responsibility in regard to public policy

What is the present status of the U.N. and U.S. technical assistance programs and the relationship between the two? What special problems are coming to the fore as these programs get under way? What are the legislative and administrative issues, involved in a continued and vigorous program consonant with the guiding principles, which now require public attention? What is the responsibility of the Churches in relation to these issues? A committee is planned to prepare a statement for discussion purposes.

4. The Churches' responsibility in their own life and work

What conclusions are to be drawn from the experience of missionary projects of a technical assistance or training character? In view of evolving governmental programs in this field, what are the new or continuing responsibilities in relation to the Younger Churches? In what ways should mission boards and missionaries in the field relate themselves to the technical assistance programs of government? In what ways, if any, should assistance be accepted from government in carrying on such projects under church auspices? A committee of missionary leaders and representatives of overseas churches is being asked to prepare a report for discussion.